

Protecting Children from Predators

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Some attempts at child abductions have recently occurred in our area.

Earlier this summer, a man was found targeting little girls at Chapel Hill Mall, trying to lure them away from their parents just a few feet away. A few weeks later, two men in their late twenties to early thirties attempted to entice two 10-year-old girls into their truck outside Indian Trail School by offering the age-old ploy of candy. At the time of this article, potential perpetrators in both cases are still at large.



Telling your children “don’t talk to strangers” is not enough.

Children sometimes have difficulty identifying a “friendly-looking” person as a stranger, mistaking people who do not look mean or scary as safe.

Kids naturally trust adults and may feel a false sense of security from strangers who may look nice or well-meaning.

Rather than being on the lookout for certain types of people, teach children to watch for certain types of behaviors, such as people who seem overly friendly, who offer candy or money, or who hang out in parks or playgrounds.

Talking to kids about this subject can be tricky because, depending on their age, kids can frighten easily or brush off cautionary words. We certainly don’t want to frighten our children, and many parents find it a daunting task to talk to broach this topic with their kids. But every parent must have this conversation with their children and revisit it frequently to remind kids of these potential dangers.

Parents can start by reviewing safety tips with their children.

- Your children should always stay close to you in a public place. Map out what to do if they ever become separated from you in a mall, airport, or other large public place.
- Your children should not play outside alone; they should always be within sight of you or another trusted adult.
- Your children should know what to do if someone approaches them with “candy,” or asks for help finding a lost puppy, or claims to need directions—they should run away and tell a trusted adult immediately. It may sound cliché, but many children are abducted with just such ploys.
- Clearly identify with your child public figures who are safe to go to if they become lost or separated from you in an emergency. These might include police officers, firefighters, security guards, nurses, and paramedics. A child who becomes separated from you in a store should approach the person behind the cashier’s counter for help.

- Teach your children that it is appropriate not to listen to an adult if that person is asking them to do something that makes them scared, confused, or uncomfortable. Tell your kids to alert a trusted adult if a stranger is lingering around their playground, nearby park, or yard.

- Tell your child to never get into a car with an unknown person.

- If someone tries to grab your child, they should know what to do—make a huge scene kicking, yelling, wriggling, scratching, and screaming, “I don’t know you! You’re not my mom (or dad)!” Many children avoid abduction this way. Try role-playing with them as practice.

- If you have school-age children and they are home alone, remind them to never open the door for a stranger and always keep the doors to your home locked. Likewise, they should never tell someone who calls that they are home alone.



- Tell your children to never give information about themselves or family members to strangers over the phone, like identifying where you live.

- Tell your child that adults don’t ask kids to keep secrets. If someone hurts them and asks them not to tell anyone, they should always tell a trusted adult immediately. Reassure your child that you would love them and believe them, no matter what—even if the person hurting them is a relative or friend.

- Write out with your child the names of at least three people to call for help; help them memorize these phone numbers. Finally, review with them the basics—dial 9-1-1 should they ever need help. There are resources available to help initiate conversations with your child. Ask your pediatrician for suggestions on how to broach the subject about these safety precautions, do an Internet search, or talk to other parents about how they have prepared their children.

While it is unlikely that your child will ever become lost, missing, or abducted, we can never be too safe with our children. Educating them on appropriate rules sets the stage and empowers them to make good choices about their own safety.

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